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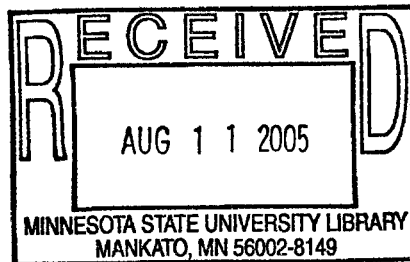
Boxes: Exploring Gender Identity Through Performance

By
Desirée D. Rowe

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree
In
Speech Communication

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Mankato, Minnesota

May 2005



ABSTRACT

SPEECH COMMUNICATION

BOXES: EXPLORING GENDER IDENTITY THROUGH PERFORMANCE

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Minnesota State University, Mankato. Mankato, Minnesota. 2005.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the patterns of identity and self explored through the lenses of intertextuality, feminist postmodern identity, and confession. A performance methodology is used wherein the performance brings to the fore explicitly visible gender norms standardized by everyday life through the enactment of the theoretical background. The performance, *Boxes*, is a piece that entangles multiple identities, which attempt to dislocate norms and ideals the audience has already established. During the performance comment cards were distributed to audience members for their reflection on the overall message of the performance. The cards were collected and evaluated to determine the reflexivity of the theory and narrative material utilized with the performance text.

This research supports the notion that there are hierarchical systems of oppression firmly entrenched within our culture. However, through public methodologies such as performance, it is possible to allow the audience to engage their own perspective on these varying hierarchies. Audience feedback (either positive or negative) shows that the intertextual narratives used did make a strong impact on the audience. The narratives were selected and constructed based on a theoretical background, which is ultimately proven valid.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must express my deepest admiration, respect, and appreciation to Dr. Leah White for all of her dedication and support for this project. Leah gave me the confidence and the inspiration to perform my heart out. There are not enough thanks in the world for such an amazing and talented woman.

The name of Dr. Daniel Cronn-Mills appears in many acknowledgement pages, for good reason. Dan makes every student feel like the most gifted and intelligent scholar they can be. His guidance and encouragement makes me forever indebted to him.

Special gratitude is also due for Dr. Craig Matarrese for his superior insight and dedication of time for this project.

I would also like to thank my parents, Kathleen and Tom Guhl. Though in New Jersey, they are forever offering me guidance and support. I love you both dearly.

Finally, this thesis and performance is dedicated to Paul Board. His wisdom, faith, and tolerance allowed me to construct a product that I am proud of.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Performance as Method of Inquiry.....	1
Theoretical Background.....	3
Postmodern Feminist Identity.....	3
Confession.....	4
Intertextuality.....	6
II. PERFORMANCE SCRIPT.....	9
III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE/SCRIPT.....	25
Postmodern Feminist Identity.....	25
Confession.....	32
Intertextuality.....	37
IV. REFLECTION.....	41
ENDNOTES.....	50
APPENDICES.....	51
A. Location of Performance Recording.....	51
B. Performance Program.....	52
C. Performance Flyer.....	53
REFERENCES.....	54

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Individually, we all embark on a daily production of the self. This production ranges from the most mundane task of putting on clothes to the intricate dance of attracting a partner. This daily production is multiplied by weeks, months, and years to establish patterns of identity. In the realm of staged performance, we have seen patterns of identity formulated as a struggle to create the self. From Sophocles's *Antigone* to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* this struggle is the major thematic element. The popularity of these plays speaks to the individual's need for validation. To discover the roots of this yearning for personal validation it is important to examine contemporary performance in conjunction with necessary theoretical background. In the course of this thesis, I will explore the patterns of identity and self through the lenses of intertextuality, feminist postmodern identity, and confession. To garner a better understanding of these intertwined theoretical viewpoints, this chapter will guide the reader through the introductory aspects of this analysis. First, I validate the utilization of performance as a method of inquiry. This understanding of performance will buttress the explanation of the theory that will guide my thesis and the script construction. Next, I delineate the problem and objectives. Finally, I provide an outline for the rest of the thesis.

Performance as Method of Inquiry

A public performance is a significant means of inquiry, because a performance makes explicitly visible gender norms standardized by everyday life. By granting a place

for these norms to be deconstructed, the theoretical problems can be brought to light. As Reinelt (1994) notes: "The true political project becomes the performing of acts and gestures which contest boundaries, displace norms, disrupt regulatory and normalizing practices" (p. 100). My performance does just this by constructing a piece that entangles multiple identities, which attempt to dislocate norms and ideals the audience has already established. Reinelt grants validity as to the content of the performance, and allows for a more critical assessment of the value of the performance itself.

When the performer is granted an audience upon which to foist critical questions upon, the critique of individualized gender norms is more effective. The thesis alone would be merely theorizing, with no action to substantiate claims for improvement upon the discourse. Butler (1988) agrees action is necessary: "a critical genealogy needs to be supplemented by a politics of performative gender acts, one which redescribes existing gender identities" (p. 530). The politics within my performance is clear: the construction of gender identities is based on multiplicity, not merely an individualized perspective. By presenting performances based on a multitude of identities, the "social, political, and linguistic forces" within the construction of the individuals are highlighted (White, 2001, p. 80). Further, these "categories are exploded through the introduction of fragmented subjects, the constraining power of these forces is diminished" (*ibid*, p. 80). This deconstruction of categories is precisely what Reinelt calls for when noting performance as "political project."

The sex of the performer also lends credence to the acceptability of performance as a method of inquiry. As a female performer, I am placed in a more tenuous position in

relation to the audience, one that is preoccupied with superficial qualities of attractiveness. However, as a woman, I am in a strong position to reconstruct the popular gender discourse that is judging me. White (2001) elaborates in the explanation of the placement of “women in a position to direct this production rather than presenting their subjectivity as molded by social, political, and linguistic forces” (pp. 79-80). By allowing myself the position of actor, writer, and director I have the power to shape those forces that continually construct my gender identity.

Theoretical Background

The next three areas of analysis are presented to create a theoretical framing of the performance script. Chapter three will include a more in-depth correlation between the text and theory.

Postmodern Feminist Identity

Before delving into the various sub-sets of postmodern feminist identity utilized in the course of this discussion, it is important to understand the rationale for their use and define the terminology employed.

The main justification for the use of postmodern feminism is the notion that “All women’s performances are derived from the relationship of women to the dominant system of representation, situating themselves within a feminist critique” (Forte, 1990, p. 251). Though multiple identities are being enacted on the stage, it is important to remember that female performance artists “have used the condition of their own lives to deconstruct the system they find oppressive” (Forte, 1990, p. 253). Forte’s assertion that female performance artists have the ability to deconstruct, dovetails with the use of

postmodern feminist theory as a guiding framework for staging multiple identities. Without the power to deconstruct, my critique of gender and identity would be fruitless. Dunn (1998) notes that feminist postmodern theory is an “activist and progressive version of postmodernism” that “focuses on the epistemological play of particularity in the construction of gender, race, and sexuality” (p. 5).

Further, postmodernism allows for the notion of the fragmentation of identity, which can allow for the deconstruction of the modern patriarchy led by feminist movement. Together, these theories debilitate fixed gender roles. Feminism usurps traditional notions of the wife/mother/caregiver/etc. as the subordinate, while postmodernism eliminates all ability for those gender roles to have any implications within a fixed identity. Dunn (1998) elaborates on the place of a postmodernism that “appropriated for its own purpose the deconstructive thrust of the identity movements, creating a broad sense of crisis in Western thought and culture through its articulation of the themes of different and otherness” (p. 5). Dunn creates a place for the postmodern identity crisis easily within the confines of feminist thought, allowing for the merging of both theoretical forces.

Michel Foucault offers additional support to justify the feminist approach to identity fragmentation. Sawicki (1991) takes the standpoint of a “Focauldian feminist” who would “stress the sheer variety of ways in which effects of male domination are produced and gendered identities are constituted” (p. 63). Foucault offers assistance on the theorization of power within a hierarchical culture, and offers insight on the next area of my theoretical framework.

Confession

Foucault does offer the prevailing schema for confession that will be used in this thesis, Peters (2000) offers, however, a strong introductory definition for confession as I will frame it:

Confession is a declaration and disclosure, an acknowledgement or admission of a crime, fault, or weakness. The acknowledgement is, in part, an act to make oneself known, to disclose one's identity which focuses on the form of a discourse of private feeling or opinion. (p. 359)

This outlining of confession as a disclosure about the nature of the confessor's identity allows for the inclusion of a power structure that burdens the confessor, the main crux of Foucault's analysis.

Foucault (1990) makes a place for confession within performance: "The motivations and effects it [confession] is expected to produce have varied, as have the forms it has taken: interrogations, consultations, *autobiographical narratives*" (emphasis added, pg. 63). The confessions are bestowed upon the audience who "has taken upon itself to solicit and hear the imparting of individual pleasures" (*ibid.*, p. 63). The solicitation of confessions has granted the audience a power over the confessor/performer. Foucault (1990) reinforces this power structure: "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained) but in the one who listens and says nothing" (p. 62). This power creates a hierarchy that begins to be reminiscent of the same power structures feminist analysts are working to dispose of within postmodern culture.

This power structure is something I will attempt to dissolve. Though there will be an initial acceptance of the audience/performer dualism to make an exchange, I will not allow the audience to wield the power of my own confession upon me. The empowerment the audience is granted in hearing my own identity crisis will be reversed and given to the performer. This taking back of the confession, in turn, will cause frustration and a momentary identity crisis for the audience itself. Phelan (1988) advocates this turn of power from a feminist perspective:

If a feminist critical analysis of gender issues through performance is going to be written, however, it must begin not with an analysis of the male gaze, but rather with a reexamination of the economy of exchange between the performer and the spectator in performance. (p.111)

The analysis of the exchange between performer and audience through confession is a focus of my work, and fulfills Phelan's request of feminist scholarship. By questioning the power structure Foucault believes is so innately ingrained in the spectator, negative implications may occur. However negative those implications may be, they are critical to breaking down a hierarchical system.

Intertextuality

It is not possible for a successful simulacrum to be composed without addressing the issue of intertextuality. Jameson (1991) offers a vivid postmodern construction of intertextuality: "depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth)" (p. 12). This lack of depth that Jameson proposes qualifies intertextuality as not necessarily a negative component of

postmodernity. Allen (2000) reinforces the positives of intertextuality in the creation of identities within postmodernism: "previous modes of identity and expression, based on the shared sense of the ruling norm, gave way to heterogeneous, rootless culture in which neither norm nor resistance to that norm seems any longer possible" (p.183).

Intertextuality is seen as a force that does lack the depth of one individual's perspective, but granting a voice to a multitude of perspectives gives a depth that does not conform to the homogeneous singular vision.

Jackson (2004) explains that it is necessary to repeat "various identities so they cannot become fixed or essentialized" (p. 679). The intertwining of these identities allows no one identity to become the predominant focal point and seize the spotlight. The intertextuality of a performance with a goal to de-centralize the nature of a singular gender identity is crucial to the outcome.

It is again important to examine the position of a female performer who is utilizing intertextuality. Gilmore (1994) expands, noting "autobiography provides a stage where women may experiment with reconstructing the various discourses of representation" (p. 85). As a female performer, a singular role of representation would be the easiest to construct within performance. However, when utilizing intertextuality, a female performer explores the freeing possibility of employing an abundance of persona to construct various identities.

Précis of Remaining Chapters

This introductory chapter begins the discussion upon which my performance piece hopes to expand. The next chapter will be the script itself. The script will stand

alone, without any of my analysis, for the reader to absorb and pass judgment. The script will be in seven segments that chronicle the identity process from ages thirteen to twenty-two.

The third chapter will be a reader's guide to the script. This reader's guide will include the same script from chapter two, but with analysis. Each segment of the performance will be critiqued based on the theoretical background established within this chapter. Further, the review of literature will be interspliced within the chapter, allowing for appropriate reference points for the literature. This chapter will be the analysis section of the thesis, allowing for an illumination of the written text based on the given framework.

The final chapter will be a reflection on the writing process and performance. At this time, the reaction of the audience will be included in the analysis to explore the perceptions of the identity experiment. During the performance, I will pass out comment cards to the audience requesting their reactions of the performance. These comments will be integrated within the reflection. This chapter will also allow me, as the writer/performer, to articulate the difficulties I have had in this endeavor. To do this effectively, I will refer to a journal kept through both the writing and staging process.

CHAPTER II

PERFORMANCE SCRIPT

SEGMENT I

To tell the whole story, there wouldn't be enough space. It's like sitting in a crowded airport and watching all the people scurry about like ants reacting to a child's mirror. I can't articulate all of the stories that the ants have to tell...they are crafty creatures that slip in and out of the picture wearing the same costume. Nearly indistinguishable from each other.

In the beginning there was me.

I never knew that there was so much want and need surrounding me, because I got everything I ever wanted. We were poor...but I didn't know what that was. Until as a young girl I couldn't staple my book report because we didn't have a stapler.

There was a moment that I realized that all these other cats have their papers stapled and my shit is folded in the corners. You know, ghetto staple. It's not that we couldn't afford the staple, it's that we couldn't afford all the things it meant... a computer, new clothes, lunch money.

But I am not special, just like everyone in the world today, I had a rough time growing up.

It's like we are ants that emerged from this underground lair... "Army ants forage en masse for food and they are able to overcome and capture other insects. Colonies frequently migrate to new nesting sites where food is abundant" (Ants, 1991, p. 5)...the light burned our eyes but we realized that we rely on instinct, a natural urge to push towards something else.

My problems began at birth. I'm half Jewish, so, in my home, we celebrated a healthy mix of Christmas and Chanukah—Christ-mukah. That's a holiday that commemorates when Jesus Christ-stein met a Southern shiksa, had a gay baby, and then divorced. I am the Christ-mukah miracle. On my thirteenth birthday, I had a bar mitzva-hab; that's a religious remix of bar mitzvah and rehab. I was simultaneously celebrating my entrance into manhood and my teenage drug abuse problem! Hava nagila! "Sure, I'll take two. Tabs, right?" There's nothing like scoring and then dropping two tabs of "nagila" to remind you how suburban and Christian you are. In high school, I was like the funky cold hava nagila. I thought a menorah was a bong for ten people—one that never worked but looked fabulous, like mom.¹

My parents were divorced when I was eight. My father was an abusive alcoholic who, to this day pretends that:

"I never did that shit to you or your mother."

"But I remember this stuff, Dad."

"No, you don't. Your mother has been filling your head with these ideas since you were little, so you would hate me."

I went through that shit in my teenage "I don't want to eat every again" years. I will spare you the intricacies of my life. Other performers use the audience as a way to purge their past, but I need to keep all of that pure, festering bile inside.

SEGMENT II

The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah

(Interlude to audience)

I don't want to purge anything for you tonight...or am I destined to anyway? I sing and dance for you to entertain. To perform a story. This story isn't mine, or his, or hers. You sit there and yearn for my tears and tales...but it can't be true if it isn't my yarn to spin. So is this confession mine, or ours?

As a teenager I thought that I was the only person in the world who read Sassy and thought that Where the Red Fern Grows sucked, but though Animal Farm "really grasped

what it meant to be a teenager in capitalist America.” It was transitory period in my existence that was actually mildly successful. When I say successful, I mean that in the sense that life began to stabilize to the point where I could begin to figure out who I was.

When we was kids it was aight to “ax” an’ not “ask”

Cuttin da’ ends off words and tossin I-N-G’s

A homegirl axin’ “What’chyoun doin’?”

And comin’ wit da primo pastime

Chillin

Or if you’re by 108th or East 1st, it’s

Chillando pro aqui

Or alla

Depends on where you are at

Not where you ARRRE

So where YOU AT?

Instead of “am” it’s “is”

And in plural form “are” is “be”

Or sometimes “are” is tossed out all together

After all, the less words in a question means getting to the answer faster

But the rhythm comes to a screeching halt when you run into someone who don’t jive to the same beat knocking the breath outta ya with a

“That’s so ghetto”

Wha?!²

We moved to a ritzy Jewish neighborhood. My stepfather brought actual wealth into our lives. Before T, my mother and I lived with my grandparents. After, I actually had my own TV.

Orchard Townhouses was where we moved. Yea, northern NJ. There are lots of orchards there. Factory-lined streets allow for such great foliage in the fall. I lived with D on one side and Him on the other. He was a year younger than me, but incredibly hot to my puberty induced psyche.

We were all flirting and faking on Orange Lane, unable to be our real selves. Nothing but parrots. T and mom called me away from the generic gossip and teasing that was going on amongst the AquaNettted masses that I was hanging out with, they were going to dinner and I unless I wanted to starve I better hurry my ass up.

As my parents were nearing the car, He screamed out to them:

“HEY! YOUR DAUGHTER HAS THE NICEST TITS I HAVE EVER SEEN!!”

...and I was mortified.

And I heard a murmer flow through my friends:

“Well, that’s cause she’s fat.”

On the way to TGI Fridays I cried in silence in the backseat. This was the first time I even began to think about my weight, or even that I might have breasts. As I was sobbing to myself, the sounds from the radio provided the perfect background to my new phobia.

(Play "Brick House" by The Commodores)

SEGMENT III

The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah

(Interlude to audience)

When you combine really dark colors don't you always get brown? Each color becomes indistinguishable. These stories all tell the same story...your story, my story, our story. I'm not here to ask for your acceptance of what we've done...just for you to understand that you have done some really shitty things too.

At fifteen, I bet a kid ten dollars that he could not jerk off in front of me. I never paid him. I looked at all the other girls in my high school and didn't understand how they knew that guys would think they were attractive. I didn't know how they gained their confidence every morning from applying layers of Maybelline and Wet and Wild, and not wearing the mandatory gym shorts under their cheerleader skirts.

I was engaging in a form of prostitution to pay this kid to show me what I thought was true...I was too fat, too ugly, and too damn loud for anyone to ever find me attractive. There still is no proof that it was me that made him cum. To this day, that fifteen year old girl is still within me...always wondering if it really is me...or just my tits.

When we go underground, we begin the real work. "Some army ants, form temporary nests that consist of the ants themselves, suspended from one another or a supporting object. It is a living ball of ants." (Ants, 1991, p. 5). It's all just sheer manual labor with no emotion or feeling. Just lugging and fucking.

My ex-lover's teeth clamped down on my ear when he told me that if I loved him, he wouldn't have to wear protection. Years later, I pulled his lies from my body like a knitted sweater come undone. I pull lies- from my eyes, ears, and thighs. When my lover bit down on another's ear, did he bother to call the ten-digit number that was taped to my blood sample at the free clinic? Did it "not feel the same way with it on" for the others? All tragedies aren't born in Greece.¹

In 1996, my best friends uncle died of AIDS. I don't talk to her anymore...she drives a Lexus and lives in Manhattan. He would take us out to Applebees and buy us beer, and we would spill our guts about our lame-ass high school conquests. Once, Uncle took us to the NYC and we got into Twilo, a super-mega club. That's the first time I ever saw

someone snorting drugs. He would take us around and introduce us to people. After each person he'd say shit like:

"That's Alan. He gives head for speedballs. If either of you turn out like that, I'd hunt you down and kill you."

K never told me Uncle had AIDS. I don't know if it's because he never told her. The night after he died we looked up AIDS in the library and it told us that AIDS was a disease for only gay men. I knew this shit wasn't true, but when at the funeral, gay men comforted us like we were brothers. I was scared to catch AIDS from their tears.

SEGMENT IV

The ants go marching three by three, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching three by three, hurrah, hurrah

(Interlude to audience)

Confused yet? I sure as fuck am. Let me attempt to break it down for you. Though our stories might occur in different states, languages, or cultures...there is nothing special. My pain is as great as yours...and don't two negatives cancel each other out?

I never thought it would be like this

But bullies and acquaintances who weren't familiar with the flavor, or the geography, would latch in their claws between the lines...

THEM: "Yo Yo Yo, I NEVa' thought it'd BE like this, yo, yo, yo! I just just love your accent. Bling! Bling! Uh-Huh! Yeah, I'm down with the bling bling! For shizzel my nizzel!

I want to punctuate what I say not how I say it/I'm not fighting to be heard/I need to be heard right!

But in time, I learned to lighten the bones in my hands, the heaviness in my voice...

I held onto/every word/every/ING/every/enD-ING/syllable until I sounded like everyone else, indistinguishable, till I wasn't there anymore.²

The work continues. The pulling, tugging, tearing, pushing of another for your own gain.

"Some ants have entered into parasitic relations with other ants. Some parasitic ants are permanent residents of the host colony and are so specialized that they have lost the worker caste" (Ants, 1991, p. 6). While yearning and pushing, we are stealing and mimicking those next to us.

For three years we went to the Dyke March together, and I never felt like I was supposed to be there. She was/is intelligent and beautiful and all I ever want/wanted. I was/am in love with someone I idolized and eventually parroted. I have/did lost/loose my identity in the fog of being an out Les-bi-an who doesn't/didn't take shit from anyone and made/makes out with her girlfriend on Wall Street just to piss off those Wall Street

assholes with briefcases full of money that would have helped “my people” pay their fucking rent.

I was always expected to be at the protest marches, listen to all the right music, read all the hip young Les-bi-an/feminist/separatist literature, perform the pieces that spoke about “my suffering” and didn’t assume a heterosexist paradigm. I never won with that shit. I only did it ‘cause it made my coming out easier. When I saying “coming out” I mean my “coming out” to Dykes that expected me to be prepared like I was a fucking debutante in training. She was their fearless leader, and being Her younger lover, I was the next generation. In being who they/She wanted me to be, I/we never figured out who the fuck we/I was.

Outside the city limits there are jesters’ judgements, jabs, right hooks, and fakes
 Ready to strike the throat and thwart the vocal chords
 But there are those down neck that hold tight to the terminology made like tribal beats
 and home grown like fo’receeeceaaaaallll!!

Unlike then...

I opt for the calm.

Maybe I sold out, maybe I just grew up, or maybe I compromised.²

SEGMENT V

O.K...so now you have heard all of this bullshit. And you begin to wonder: "If this is leads to where it is supposed to why the fuck am I sitting here...MISERABLE?"

So you start packing all of your possessions into little boxes. You have to pack them in little boxes so they can go in your little, red, urban car that's really awesome on gas mileage. You have to pack so little you are throwing away shit like tampons and soap and socks and keeping knick-knacks from 1989, and pictures of you smiling brightly with the arms of your ex-girlfriend around you pretending like there is nothing in this whole world that could ever in a million years hurt you and giant pillows 'cause they kinda sorta smell like you parents house. You are keeping those stupid trinkets because know one knows you where you are going, and you are sure as fuck going to need something to remind you of who you are...or were.

And that's what you want right? You want to be unknown.

And you keep packing. And you keep packing. And you keep packing. And you keep packing.

...breathe heavily...

And you are not packing a lot...you're just packing slow. Because you know you are always going to be packing. You are destined to keep fucking moving. Isn't that the world you were born into?

And you are packing slow because you don't want to say goodbye again. You don't want to say goodbye to your best friend who is always able to understand what is wrong by a single expression. He sleeps in the same apartment as you and is now going to be 1200 miles away.

And isn't this what you want? You want to be unknown.

And you are saying goodbye to your family. To your mother, who has always been close enough to drive to. Who offers you drive, and strength. Who offers you passion to keep pushing to be the best at whatever insane task you try to accomplish. Your pillar is going to be so far away you have to think about what time it is out there before you call her.

But you keep packing.

You pack all of this shit into that little car that is wobbling on four tiny tires. Standing on the stoop of your urban apartment you gaze at your overstuffed urban car and realize that you are destined for a place that doesn't have stoops. A place that smells like

...nothing.

A place where people smile at you and they don't want money. A place that has more potlucks in a year than you have ever been to in your life. A place that is so unfamiliar to you, you don't even know the states that border it.

At this moment you climb into the tiny red car that will soon be overrun by large trucks that can navigate through six feet of snow without stalling, and think that nothing can make this moment more absurd.

You turn on that little engine and it happens.

The one thing.

The thing that makes you smile through tears that have soaked your shirt and snot that has hit your tongue. The thing that forces you to realize that you are just a cog in this giant machine, and try as you might you will never escape.

The radio is low. You say fuck it...and slowly turn the volume up. If you don't enjoy the absurd moments, what else do you have?

(Play "Brick House" by The Commodores)

To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The ants go marching seven by seven, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching seven by seven, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching seven by seven,

The little one stops to pray to heaven

And they all go marching down to the ground

To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The ants go marching eight by eight, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching eight by eight, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching eight by eight,

The little one stops to shut the gate

And they all go marching down to the ground

To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The ants go marching nine by nine, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching nine by nine, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching nine by nine,

The little one stops to check the time

And they all go marching down to the ground

To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The ants go marching ten by ten, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching ten by ten, hurrah, hurrah

The ants go marching ten by ten,

The little one stops to say "THE END"

And they all go marching down to the ground

To get out of the rain, BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE/SCRIPT

Now that a thorough understanding of theoretical background of the script has been acquired, and a reading of the script itself has been accomplished, I can address the intersection of theory within performance. In the course of this chapter, I will dissect the script through the lenses of postmodern feminism, confession, and intertextuality. This chapter serves as a reader's guide to the performance, allowing the audience (if they desire) to delve deeper into the meanings of seemingly illogical performance choices. To construct a seamless analysis, the performance script functions as the artifact, with the theoretical investigation addressing the text directly, and the review of literature buttressing the analysis.

Postmodern Feminist Identity

Forte (1990) illuminates the dichotomy between female performance artists and the "assertion of female drives and sexuality" (p. 259). The work of female artists "reclaims the female body from its patriarchal textualization through writing the body" (*ibid.*, p. 259) and therefore fulfilling the assertion of sexuality that some female performance artists regularly enact. For example, Laurie Anderson, a popular performance artist, utilizes technology to rewrite the cultural inscriptions of her own body. Striff (1997) describes a scene from Anderson's work *Stories From The Nerve Bible*: "Anderson literally becomes a cyborg through technological enhancements, and her cybernetic body transgresses the culturally defined role of woman" (p. 2). Anderson epitomizes a cyborg by using synthesizers for vocal distortion, moving in a robotic

fashion, and projecting her own script on her body. By speaking out against your own inscriptions, the female performance artist has "the potential to counter the biological essentialism which becomes an issue in the work of many women performance artists" (*ibid.*, p. 2). Within my own script, the strive to reclaim my own physical being from the grasp of the audience occurs in Segment II when I realize my own physical limitations:

As my parents were nearing the car, He screamed out to them:

"HEY! YOUR DAUGHTER HAS THE NICEST TITS I HAVE EVER SEEN!!"

...and I was mortified.

And I heard a murmur flow through my friends:

"Well, that's cause she's fat."

On the way to TGI Friday's I cried in silence in the backseat. This was the first time I even began to think about my weight, or even that I might have breasts. As I was sobbing to myself, the sounds from the radio provided the perfect background to my new phobia.

This segment allows me, as the performer, to de-mystify who I am. Though not as obvious as Anderson, within the above selection I am attempting to reclaim a part of myself that was lost among the taunts and teases of my peers. If I can re-enact the scene within which that dis-possession took place, I am able to claim the comments of the other for myself, and manipulate the circumstances to create an instance of empowerment. This reclaiming of the body for the possession of the artist is a theme among many feminist writers (Bowlby, 1983; Cixous, 1981; Kristeva, 1986) and is indicative of a broader "struggle in feminism over how to reconcile its conflicting theories of identity and the

self" (Dolan, 1988, p. 59). To garner a fuller understanding of the construction of identity, many feminist writers turned to postmodern notions that permit the deconstructing of the system of representation that has served to oppress others (Butler, 1999; de Lauretis, 1984). These systems of representation include both compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy, which only allow for the expression of singular identities within a sphere of normativity. Within this normative sphere, multiple identities cannot exist because of the contradictions that those identities would embody. For example, it is difficult within our normative sphere to embody the identities of both a lesbian and a homemaker.

The call to dismantle the systems in favor of a multiplicity of identities is a cornerstone of my performance text. I allude to my possible adoption of the more sexualized identities in Segment III:

At fifteen, I bet a kid ten dollars that he could not jerk off in front of me. I never paid him. I looked at all the other girls in my high school and didn't understand how they knew that guys would think they were attractive. I didn't know how they gained their confidence every morning from applying layers of Maybelline and Wet and Wild, and not wearing the mandatory gym shorts under their cheerleader skirts.

I was engaging in a form of prostitution to pay this kid to show me what I thought was true...I was too fat, too ugly, and too damn loud for anyone to ever find me attractive. There still is no proof that it was me that made him cum. To this day,

that fifteen year old girl is still within me...always wondering if it really is me...or just my tits.

This graphic scene illustrates the failure of my teenage persona to adopt the identity of another type of female. By using descriptions of my own body, I am "offering a way to understand how a cultural convention is embodied and enacted" (Butler, 1990b, p.276). Butler (1988) further elaborates: "just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part..." (p. 526). In my performance, the body becomes a focal point for various segments, allowing for the deconstruction of a singular identity. Jackson (2004) agrees with the ability of female subjects to "subversively transform, refuse, parody, or rupture the laws of discourse, thereby reconstituting themselves" (p. 675). In this process, "identities emerge as neither foundational grounds nor fully expressed products" (*ibid.*, p. 675). In the above excerpt, I am doing just as Jackson postulates. By not adopting the identities of the more sexualized females, I am seeking to subvert a constructed feminine identity. Further, my own fragmented identity does not know how to relate in a binary gender system. This identity confusion sets-up the scene, where I engage in "reverse" prostitution with a man. Again, my gendered body is mis-interpreting the culturally inscribed role it has been assigned. Jackson (2004) uses the same postmodern deconstruction to take a closer look at subjectivity within her own life as "a working-class girl in an extended, loving, southern Baptist family" (p. 677). Kondo (1990), a postmodern feminist, (1990) asserts that "identity is not a fixed thing, it is negotiated" through her study of work life within Japanese culture (p. 24). Further, Kondo (1990)

notes that identity is a “result of culturally available meanings, and the results of those meanings” (*ibid.*, p.24).

Normative identity categories are used “to regulate people through a process of interpellation...that initiates her into a subjected status” (Jackson, 2004, p. 677). This categorization takes place through the interpretation of the body, and through the individual’s use of linguistics as well (Althusser, 1971). An individual is often categorized based on her use of the prescribed normative lexicon. Then, an identity is constructed based on their appropriate use (upper-class/preppy) or mis-use (white trash/ghetto/slum) of the language. In the performance script, the vignettes authored by Angela Kariotis offer her interpretation of the mis-use of linguistics that force normative identity construction:

When we was kids it was aight to “ax” an’ not “ask”

Cuttin da’ ends off words and tossin I-N-G’s

A homegirl axin’ “What’chyoun doin’?”

And comin’ wit da primo pastime

Chillin

Or if you’re by 108th or East 1st, it’s

Chillando pro aqui

Or alla

Depends on where you are at

Not where you ARRRE

So where YOU AT?

Instead of "am" it's "is"

And in plural form "are" is "be"

Or sometimes "are" is tossed out all together

After all, the less words in a question means getting to the answer faster

But the rhythm comes to a screeching halt when you run into someone who don't

jive to the same beat knocking the breath outta ya with a

"That's so ghetto"

Wha?!

I want to punctuate what I say not how I say it/I'm not fighting to be heard/I need
to be heard right!

But in time, I learned to lighten the bones in my hands, the heaviness in my
voice...

I held onto/every word/every/ING/every/enD-ING/syllable until I sounded like
everyone else, indistinguishable, till I wasn't there anymore.

Dunn (1998) elaborates on the normative function of discourse: "language, as the means of discourse, becomes a vehicle for the articulation of normative prescriptions. In other words, discourse serves as a system of social control" (p. 192). In terms of the performance, the above selection illustrates how Kariotis expresses her distaste for another to construct a system that confines her identity. In the beginning of the example, Kariotis enacts her own manipulation of language to construct her own identity. However, by the end of the excerpt, Kariotis has adopted the lexicon of others in order to "look normal." In this case, Kariotis was forced to construct her identity based on the

paradigm of another. In relation to the postmodern subject, Lorde (1984) expresses the same concern: "I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole" (p.120).

Just as I use Kariotis' work to illuminate the breakdown of the general normativity of language within the construction of identity, Karen Finley is another performance artist who utilizes linguistics within performance. Finley merges both the dissection of the postmodern use of the body and the linguistic expectations of performance (Kubiak, 1998; Schechner, 1993; Wilcox, 1997). Striff (1997) explains: "Finley degrades the female body itself, transgressing the accepted representations of the feminine form in our culture" (p. 8). Linguistically, Finley graphically describes a scene where a father rapes a daughter using vegetables from the refrigerator. Finley's vivid descriptions are not meant to arise sorrow or sadness within the audience. Finley continues the performance by preparing those vegetables and using them on her body as "polluting objects" (Striff, 1997, p. 9). By juxtaposing a scene that elicits sadness with the potent act of inserting the vegetables in her own orifices, Finley forces the audience not to characterize her within a pre-determined identity construction.

The problem still exists on how to enact the postmodern deconstruction on stage within the academic sphere. Jay (1993) notes that "performance art, both in and out of the classroom, seeks to subvert the deed as well as rhetoric the domination of male models of cultural superiority" (p. 31). In my own performance, I enact this subversion through the telling of my own experiences in relocating for the purpose of enrolling in a Master's

program. Segment V reflects my difficulty in the transition of one stage of my life to the next:

And you are packing slow because you don't want to say goodbye again. You don't want to say goodbye to your best friend who is always able to understand what is wrong by a single expression. He sleeps in the same apartment as you and is now going to be 1200 miles away.

And isn't this what you want? You want to be unknown.

And you are saying goodbye to your family. To your mother, who has always been close enough to drive to. Who offers you drive, and strength. Who offers you passion to keep pushing to be the best at whatever insane task you try to accomplish. Your pillar is going to be so far away you have to think about what time it is out there before you call her.

But you keep packing.

Jay (1993) describes this as: "no more closets, no more subterfuges, they [female academic performance artists] defiantly assert; we're big girls now" (p. 30). Though Jay is somewhat trivializing the experience, it is a heady notion that I can break out of the "hard-nosed academic female" identity construction to grant a voice to a more emotive part of myself.

Confession

The power of confession has been the subject of a myriad of inquiries. Ranging from the political power of confession (Aladjem, 1991) to confession within queer theory (Namaste, 1994) to confession within the medical field (Usher et. al., 1995). The

At points in the performance, I enact various sexualized vignettes including homosexuality, AIDS, and masturbation. Foucault (1990) remarks "confession was, and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex" (p. 63). In my performance, by performing such sexualized scenes I am seemingly asking for the forgiveness of the audience. However, in Segment III, the audience is asked to consider their own "sins" in place of those I am performing:

When you combine really dark colors don't you always get brown? Each color becomes indistinguishable. These stories all tell the same story...your story, my story, our story. I'm not here to ask for your acceptance of what we've done...just for you to understand that you have done some really shitty things too.

By directly addressing the audience, I am challenging them to remember their own sins. Once the spectators begin to relive their own experiences, they are not questioning the moral aptitude of my experiences. This process of questioning leads to the degeneration of the power dynamic that allows for the confessional process to take place.

In his study of Wittgenstein, Peters (2000) makes the link between confession and the autobiographical narrative: "autobiography as a form based upon the public truthful disclosure is conceived of as a unity or essence, is an exercise in self-deception" (p. 356). However, in the case of my performance my goal is not expiation, but to engage the audience in the practice of reflexivity. Peters (2000) agrees that this possible manipulation of confession can take place: "self-disclosure has become suspect, especially as philosophers and social scientists have become aware of the extent to which selves are constituted through discourse and cultural practices" (p. 356). I intend to

manipulate this form of self-disclosure with my performance, allowing for the inverted confessional.

The notion of forcing the individual into reflexivity has been explored through the feminist lens (Spivak, 1988) in research that is geared to make those whom are seemingly invisible in society visible through reflexivity. Reflexivity has also been evaluated as a method of qualitative research (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) by focusing on the relationship between the researcher and the subjects.

By allowing the audience to glare back at themselves, deconstruction of ingrained hierarchy can take place. As Pillow (2003) asserts: reflexivity "contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world" (p. 178). Researchers have also investigated the use of a "multi-voiced" text in which to create reflexivity (Sanders, 1999; Macbeth, 2001). In this sense, the absence of a clearly identifiable confession encourages the audience to gaze upon their own situation. Once spectators leave the performance space, they might be inclined to question or address the methods used. This audience reflexivity can only be accomplished if the performer strips away the power the audience has over the performer's confession.

Foucault (1990) comments on the placement of power within confession "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks, but in the one who listens and says nothing" (p. 62). In the case of my performance, I am asking the audience to submit their reflections on my performative choices to me via comment cards handed out

club. That's the first time I ever saw someone snorting drugs. He would take us around and introduce us to people. After each person he'd say shit like:

"That's Alan. He gives head for speedballs. If either of you turn out like that, I'd hunt you down and kill you."

K never told me Uncle had AIDS. I don't know if it's because he never told her.

The night after he died we looked up AIDS in the library and it told us that AIDS was a disease for only gay men. I knew this shit wasn't true, but when at the funeral, gay men comforted us like we were brothers. I was scared to catch AIDS from their tears.

Each vignette carries a potent message regarding sexuality and the potential of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. These vignettes are placed in this specific order to elicit an emotional response from the audience. Carlson (1994) notes: "in the context of public identity there comes to exist a link between performer and audience" (p. 112). In this case, I am seemingly confessing that public identity in order to create this bond. However, the first segment (unbeknownst to the audience) was not written by me, but a twenty-eight year old homosexual man, Ragan Fox. By convincing (or at least having the opportunity to convince), the audience that this voice is my own I am subverting the normal role of the performer. The relationship between audience and performer has been discussed in various contexts including addressing the historicity of the character (Brecht, 1964; Diamond, 1997) and the functioning of the body within performance to create believability (Blau, 1982). The use of multiple texts brings up the next area of analysis: intertextuality.

Intertextuality

Allen (2000) offers a cursory explanation of intertextuality: "all utterances depend on or call to other utterances; no utterance itself is singular; all utterance are shot through with other, competing and conflicting voices" (p. 27). This splicing of experiences and voices to formulate a polyphony or "simultaneous combination of parts or elements" takes a prominent place in postmodern textual analysis (Allen, 2000, p. 22). Two forerunners in the development of intertextuality are Kristeva 1973; and Bakhtin, 1984. Both authors formulate "attacks on notions of stable signification" (Allen, 2000, p. 31). Kristeva addresses postmodern feminist implications of intertextuality while Bakhtin's focus is on the intersections of language and literature.

My production script is the combination of four texts. The first is my own writing, which provides transitions between the other works, and adds my own story to the picture. Second, Angela Kariotis's *Reminiscence of the Ghetto & Other Things That RaiZed Me* is a performance piece written and performed by Kariotis during her tenure as a master's degree student in communication studies at the University of Texas, Austin in 2003. Kariotis's work discusses her experience growing up as a "white" Greek-American in Irvington, New Jersey. The next performance piece included in my script is Ragan Fox's *Soapbox*. Fox wrote and performed *Soapbox* as a doctoral candidate at Arizona State University in 2003. *Soapbox* chronicles Fox's experiences as a gay man who survives obstacles such as drug abuse and promiscuous sexuality. Finally, I use the entry for "Ants" in the *Grolier Encyclopedia of Knowledge*, 1991 to provide a factual background.

The integration of these four texts is to “fight against any view of the world which would valorize one ‘official’ point-of-view, one ideological position, and thus one discourse” (Allen, 2000, p. 24). By not emphasizing a singular viewpoint as the main crux on my performance I am not allowing for the adoption of a primary viewpoint, thereby rejecting the modernist notion of a singular primary identity. Intertextuality creates an allowance for a myriad of positions that would not necessarily have the ability to come together to create another schema of understanding. Gender theorist Judith Butler (1996) asserts society today “operates to quell a certain intertextual writing that might well generate wholly different epistemic maps” (p. 372). The epistemic maps that Butler speaks of “allows for the presence of fragmented subjectivities within a text” (White, 2000, p. 81). These fragmented subjects have been explored through the lens of gender (Langellier, 1993; Butler, 1990) and sexuality (Corey, 1996). Within my performance, identities are interconnected, allowing for a smooth transition from urban woman, to gay man, to lesbian and back. These identities are all presented in one voice, mine. The rationale for this performative choice is to create a seamless integration of these various intertextual element creating a voice that the audience can relate to, ultimately giving a voice to those fragmented subjectivities (Mitchell, 1993).

One of the most widely known features of intertextuality is the death of the author. In 1977, Barthes published *The Death of the Author*, which argues, “...no text sits in a vacuum or speaks its own tongue. Authors have to get their ideas from somewhere, and readers can only read in the light of what they have seen before” (Ward, 2003, p. 63).

The death of the author is further explored by postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard, (1988) and Foucault (1972).

Barthes (1977) elaborates where meaning can be found within intertextuality: "it is the language which speaks, not the author; to write is, to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', not 'me'" (p. 143). In this construction of intertextuality, the role of my performance script is clear: to construct a performance that speaks in not only my voice, but in a voice that can perform in a multitude of identities. For example, in Segment VI, I will be singing "The Ants Go Marching" while the images of other performance artists and ants are projected behind me. In doing this, I allow for the audience to "read" my performance through not only the lens of the script but through the visualization of other performance artists enacting their own identities. This utilization of the images of other artists enacts Barthes's notion of giving language the ability to perform, not just the performer.

Now that we have reviewed literature regarding postmodern feminist theory, confession, and intertextuality, while successfully applying these theoretical notions to my own performance script, it is important to understand that this performance does not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, we must examine both my reaction as the performer and the audience's reaction to my performance.

CHAPTER IV

REFLECTION

On September 12, 2004 in my personal planner I made a notation: "write perf [sic] text." If only it was that easy. I had been struggling with textual choices since June, and was to continue struggling for seven more months. In the course of this chapter, I will reflect on the process of completing this thesis project, specifically my performance. For an accurate reflection, we must first look at the choices in both script and staging, chronicling how and why specific choices were made. Within the first section, I will utilize the feedback of some of the 51 comment cards received to remark on my decisions regarding production. Next, I will delve into the theoretical applications that were outlined within chapter three. Using my personal notes and comments from the audience, I will reflect on the impact of my theoretical performative choices. In this theoretical section, I will attempt to discern if the theory reached the intended target and what type of results occurred.

An audience member wrote: "I really wish for once someone could do a piece that didn't have to be about identity. Anyone can talk about his or her life experiences. We all have a story but that doesn't mean it's appropriate to use it as the basis of your thesis." Though the only comment of its type, this reflection demonstrates, the audience (or at least one member of the audience) did grasp the very root of the performance, identity construction. However, through my choices in script construction I made it clear that I was not trying to "purge anything for you tonight" (*Boxes*, Segment II) and not reveal my own life experiences. From August 2004 to January 2005 I was working on creating a

script that not only embodied all of the theoretical notions that are present within chapter three, but one that would be engaging to me as the performer. The decision to use Kariotis' *Reminiscence of the Ghetto and Other Things that RaiZed Me* and Fox's *Soapbox* was based on my desire to use the writings of burgeoning performance artists. If I were to use the text of Laurie Anderson or Karen Finley, for example, there would be a risk of immediate author recognition. Once the individual scripts were read, I constructed an outline of how I wanted the show to be structured. Again, this process was not challenging. Both authors are incredible writers and their ability to convey emotion through short vignettes was beneficial to my script construction process. However, I did find difficulty in writing my own stories. Though I could remember and reflect upon my own experiences, it took awhile for me to realize those experiences are important enough to my own identity construction to be placed within the final script. This hesitance could be caused by my personal reluctance to share intimate details of life, coupled with the pressures of trying to create an engaging text. These pressures weighed considerably upon me in the formative stages of script construction. But, over time I began to gain confidence in my own stories. This confidence arose from the knowledge that my stories would be veiled within the singular characterization of the script.

When constructing a characterization for the script I chose to maintain a single voice through each vignette, regardless of the author. To some, the message was clear: "I think the message was that everybody has the same shit in their lives. Plain and simple, we're all the same." Another audience member notes: "Through this performance we see how an individual identity is always in connection with others." However, I think that a

change in characterization would not have been beneficial to their understanding of the layering of identity: "I didn't understand some of it, and got confused, and that's another point we're trying to get across" while another comment concurs: "the message is confusing, but identity is confusing, so it worked well with the script." This singular characterization left some of the audience bewildered, which is acceptable. One of the goals of the script was to make the audience uncomfortable with the performance, they were seeing a part of themselves. Through the single characterization choice, I feel this level of discomfort was successfully accomplished.

Another aesthetic choice made was that of the boxes placed on stage. I choose boxes for three reasons. First, boxes are a clear symbol of movement; which can be either literal (i.e. moving to a new location) or symbolic (i.e. the fluidity of movement between multiple self-identities). Four members of the audience did not realize this symbolic representation of the boxes: "I don't understand what the boxes are 4 [sic] at all" while three others did not agree with the boxes being open and closed: "I was confused by the concept of closing 2 boxes @ 1st break and the rest later." Though I did choose the boxes for aesthetic purposes, it is telling that they elucidated so many comments. It reflects the notion that staging is expected to reflect certain symbolic elements, and the audience is expecting to derive something from those elements. I had also chosen to write segments of my script on the boxes themselves, though no audience members discussed the writing on their comment cards.

Second, packing things into boxes is a key element of my last segment, and I knew that I would want to utilize them within the course of that segment. Audience

members easily recognized this dynamic of the boxes: "I thought the boxes and description of packing relayed this in an obvious but not blatant way." Some individuals also believed that the boxes related well to the integration of ants: "The boxes seemed to fit well and the incorporation of ants (those w/ no emotion)."

The final reason for choosing boxes was they were an inexpensive and easy way to fill space on the stage. As a performer, I was not comfortable performing on a bare stage because of the size of the performance space and the placement of the audience. With no obvious location of a stage within the room, the placement of props dictated to the audience where the majority of the performance was to take place. This need for a defined space seemingly violates my postmodern goals, however, I did violate this theatrical norm when I went into the audience to hand out the comment cards. Though not a single member of the audience commented on it, many looked at me with utter bewilderment. I was met with both downcast eyes and uncomfortable glances when I made my way around the audience.

Through the course of deciding the staging, a factor that was immensely important to me was the music. I spent a significant amount of time dedicated to song selection, timing, and placement. The selection was important to me because I believed I needed to select music reflective on the myriad of voices present within the show. One audience member commented on the music, simply stating: "I think the music fit well." Though disappointed at the lack of recognition, at least no one was offended or distracted by the selections, and in the respect the music did fulfill its role as underscoring, not overpowering, the moment.

Overall, the process of creating the performance was challenging, but not frustrating. I enjoyed creating the script, stage design, and music. While I lamented over these daunting tasks on numerous occasions, there was never a moment of utter despair. However, I did have trouble with other logistical aspects of the performance. Specifically, it was maddening to be the first person to create a thesis project of this type in the Speech Communication department. I had trouble securing a location that was suitable for this type of performance, Department of Theatre and Dance was accommodating, it was difficult to rationalize what exactly this thesis project was to members of a department actively involved in the thesis construction.

Now that we have taken a reflexive look at the process of performance, we can actively reflect on the theory of the performance. To effectively examine the theoretical implications of the infusion of theory, we must revisit the applications discussed within chapter three. Postmodern feminist theory, confession, and intertextuality will once again serve as our guides as we apply the comments of the audience to determine the effectiveness of our method of inquiry.

The utilization of performance as a method of inquiry was a successful endeavor. Dolan (1988) notes: "the intent of the growing, diversifying field of feminist postmodern performance theory is to develop theatre and performance strategies that will create new meanings at the site of representation" (p. 60). Through the course of this thesis, I have validated my desire to create a text that embodies the theoretical background through a performative standpoint. In adopting a performance as my method of inquiry I was able to construct both text and performance that exemplify my theoretical standpoint.

The heart of the performance text is focused on the multiplicity of identities. In Chapter Three I postulated the dismantling of various systems of representation could be accomplished through a postmodern feminist identity. One audience member noted: "you embodied the enduring motivation of a performer to find your own self-motivation" this comment accurately reflects the representation of the performer as searching to dismantle governing systems of control. This comment supports my overarching goal of actively engaging the audience in the process of reflexivity of their own situation.

Another observer commented, "we need to consciously think of our identities & not to behave just to please others." Further, Butler (1990b) agrees a workable approach to illuminate the work of dismantling involves "offering a way to understand how a cultural convention is embodied and enacted" (p. 276). An alternative method of understanding (via Butler) is accomplished through eleven comments regarding the realistic and emotional nature of the performance: "I think your performance was thought-provoking, funny, sad, frustrating, offending, and eye-opening." Once the audience was moved enough to elicit this type of commentary, clearly there was a subversion of a natural performative identity. In not performing how I was expected (i.e. multiple characters, distanced engagement with the performance text), the audience was allowed to take a closer look at normative subjectivity within their own lives. The efficacy of these comments lies in the ability to view this performance as a tool of change. The comments received from the audience were their immediate reactions, and judging by the powerful reflections on the emotional nature of the performance, it can be assumed that the spectators were engaged in the process. This engagement meets the

critical goals set forth for this performance, regardless of their own personal like or dislike of the text.

Unfortunately, not all of the audience members were able to see me outside of those normative characterizations, as one audience member postulated: "this performance was way too personal and revealing." Clearly, this observer did not see the multiplicity of identities, and projected all of the stories onto the performer. This comment moves into the next realm of theoretical application, confession.

When creating the script, I made a clear attempt to create stages that led to a build to a climax. In reality, I believe this was accomplished. Though no audience members commented on this rise, as a performer I know I was in control. Specifically, when I performed the vignette: "For three years we went to the Dyke March together" (*Boxes*, Segment III) I utilized a performance style that was, in my opinion, completely antithetical to that of confession. Foucault (1990) theorizes "the confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement" (p. 61). In this case, my brash, hardnosed segment challenges the audience to remember their own sins in place of mine, and in turn, the degeneration of the power of the audience.

However, as noted in chapter three, my goal with this performance is not expiation, but to engage the audience in reflexivity. With some audience members, reflexivity was accomplished: "Believe it or not your message made me realize things in my own life that I've neglected. Things I don't want to face" while others did not engage the text as a mirror onto themselves, but as a window onto me: "Amazing emotional performance, I could tell all of these stories meant a lot to you." This partial failure of the

script can be attributed to the power structure audience members are comfortable in being a part of, a process where they sit and absorb the confessions of the performer. In turn, the audience members who believed this was fully my story were deceived in the practice. When walking away from the sight of the performance, spectators were writing false stories upon my persona. However, this is not entirely negative. The stories are not false to me, as the performer, after this production. In using the lives of both Kariotis and Fox, I have absorbed, memorized, and felt with them. This absorption of their stories contributes to the multiplicity of my own identity, and in some ways, these "fake" vignettes have become a part of me just as the "real" ones are. Concurrently, when the spectator is walking out of the performance space, they are also writing these stories on their own bodies. When any member of that audience is in a somewhat similar situation to any of the vignettes that were portrayed they will, hopefully, recall my stories. In doing this, this performance would be effecting and affecting their own formation of self and identity.

This notion of weaving "fake" and "real" stories moves into our next area of evaluation, intertextuality. In allowing a multiplicity of stories to be told with this single performance piece, I was attempting to "fight against any view of the world which would valorize one 'official' point-of-view, one ideological position, and thus one discourse" (Allen, 2000, p. 24). In evaluating my performance, the most fault can be found with my use of intertextuality. As seen throughout this reflection, many audience members did not grasp the concept of the multiple voices within the piece. If and when spectators did realize there was a conglomeration of stories, the desired effects did occur. However, I

was not entirely successful in my attempt. In retrospect, the one area that could have made the distinction between stories more vivid was the selection of the original performance pieces. I could have gone to the opposite end of the spectrum and integrated texts from performance artists drastically different from myself, and hold a singular characterization through the entirety of the piece.

Though easily accomplished in theory, there was an amount of difficulty in producing a performance that successfully accomplished the goals of intertextuality and confession. As noted above, I was unable to show the multiplicity of voices through single characterization. However, if I was going to rethink my performance objectives to highlight intertextuality, I would need to use multiple characters. This multiple character perspective would, unfortunately tarnish the notion of confession. It would be difficult to maintain a level of intimacy with the audience in order uphold my goal of reversing the hierarchy of confession. This double bind of intertextuality/confession is only one area of reflection.

Another area that could have been changed for the multiplicity of stories to be seen more clearly is to manipulate the text. I could have refrained from editing out parts of Kariotis and Fox that would have "outed" them as not written by myself. In altering the text, I would have lent more confusion to the audience, but perhaps achieved the desired effect. It is nearly impossible to speculate on how the reactions to the performance would have changed if I had made decisions regarding the integration of the theory within the text. This performance was at the mercy of a subjective audience with subjective viewpoints.

Overall, this performance was successful. Approaching the stage, I felt prepared, confident, and proud of the text and staging I had created. While I was performing, I was comforted to know no one was walking out on me, people were laughing in the right places, and even a few people in the first two rows were crying. As the performer, I knew, immediately following the performance, I had accomplished all of the goals I had personally laid out for myself. There was never a moment of doubt that I did not achieve what I wanted to achieve, the integration of both theory and practice.

NOTES:

¹ Fox, R. (2003). *Soapbox*. Unpublished manuscript.

² Kariotis, A. (2003). *Reminiscence of the ghetto & other things that raiZed me*. Unpublished manuscript.

APPENDIX A

LOCATION OF PERFORMANCE RECORDING

The recording on *Boxes* performed on March 9th, 2005 at Minnesota State University, Mankato will not be located in the library at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The script is constructed of the performance texts of both Angela Kariotis and Ragan Fox, which are not credited on the recording of the performance. These performers do not wish for the open accessibility of their texts with out the proper bibliographic references immediately available. For this reason, the recording of the performance will be held at the Department of Speech Communication main office, located at 230 Armstrong Hall, Minnesota State University, Mankato.

APPENDIX B

PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

Boxes: A Performance in Search of an Identity

Performed by **Desiree Rowe**, a graduate student in the Dept. of Speech Communication.

This show will be performed in six segments, with no intermission. This show is a conglomeration of texts. Including: *Reminiscences of the Ghetto and Other Things that RaiZed Me* by Angela Kariotis; *Soapbox* and *Kid: A Hilarious Look at Child Molestation* by Ragan Fox. Desiree thanks all those whose words were twisted and manipulated to formulate this show.

This show thanks: Paul Board, Christopher Pont, and all the Speech Communication Teaching Assistants.

Most importantly, Kathleen and Tom, who always understand.

This show also thanks the committee: Dr. Leah White, Dr. Daniel Cronn-Mills, and Dr. Craig Mataresse.

This show scoffs at Mr. Darcy from Ocean Township High School, who was mean to all his students.

@ the end of the performance you will be asked to fill out response cards. Please be constructive in your comments regarding *Boxes*. Your responses will be utilized within the final chapter of Desiree's master's thesis.

APPENDIX C

PERFORMANCE FLYER



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